

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COURTS LOCATED 79 PERCENT OF MISSING FOSTER CHILDREN IN 2004

LANSING, MI, January 20, 2005 – A Michigan Supreme Court-initiated program aimed at finding children missing from foster care located 79 percent of children who were missing in 2004, the Court has reported.

In November 2002, the Court ordered all state trial courts to create plans for “the establishment of a special docket or other expedited process” to find foster children who are absent without permission from legal placements (AWOLP). Children who are AWOLP typically have run away or been illegally removed from a placement. The person who abducts a child from a legal placement is often a family member.

A total of 787 foster children were reported missing in 2004, including 72 who were AWOLP twice and 17 who were AWOLP three times. Family court judges helped locate 618 children, or 79 percent, in 2004, including 42 who were located twice and two who were located three times.

The courts’ efforts include holding hearings at which judges question social workers and others who may have information about a missing foster child’s whereabouts.

Chief Justice Clifford W. Taylor praised the trial courts’ efforts. “Kudos should go to all the judges and court staff involved, and to the Family Independence Agency staff who cooperated in this effort,” he said. “They may very well have saved the lives of some of these children.”

Taylor credited former Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan with recommending the special docket program to the Court. “She saw a problem, and her response was swift and effective,” he said.

The Chief Justice stressed that “These are difficult cases. But, while the courts may not be able to find every child, the judicial branch will continue to bring its best efforts to this problem.”

Kathryne A. O’Grady, Director of Child Welfare Services for the State Court Administrative Office, noted that most missing foster children are age 12 and older. “Some of these children run away time after time because they want independence or have adults in their lives who encourage them to leave,” she said. “Another complicating factor is that a number of AWOLP children are reported to be in other states or countries, which makes it more difficult to find and return them.”

O'Grady said that her office is compiling the most effective practices for locating AWOLP children from courts around the state. "We've made significant progress, and we're going to work on ways to have the most effective process we can," she said.

In Michigan, the family division of circuit court is entrusted with protecting the welfare of children who are under court jurisdiction. Over 19,000 children are in foster care in Michigan; the vast majority were removed from their original homes because they were abused or neglected.

Missing foster children are featured on the Family Independence Agency Child Locator website at <http://www.michigan.gov/fia>. Anyone with information about a missing foster child may call toll-free at 1-866-729-0026.

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